



March 27, 2013

Chairman Kerns and members of the committee, my name is Ross Middlemist.

From a hilltop vantage, my youngest son and I admire our contented cattle, green fields, and large haystacks on a late August day. "Just imagine," I said, "this ranch could look like this every year if we had enough irrigation water."

That was two years ago when we did have enough water, which doesn't happen every year.

But a few weeks ago I told my son, "I can't, in good conscious, tell you to stay here if we lose our water rights. You might want to start looking for land somewhere else."

I made that statement with a heavy heart, as 2013 marks 100 years that the Middlemist family has lived and ranched in Dixon. During those 100 years, this land has been consecrated with our blood, sweat, and tears.

Last spring, I learned the Joint Board Commissioners and staff were on the verge of handing our water rights over to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. I was stunned. Like many other water users, I had much confidence in our negotiators. I believed they were the best of the best to protect the rights we had bought and paid for.

Instead, the board voted seven to four in favor of the compact, encouraged by their staff attorney and advisor. It was an unbelievable turn of events. Rather than protect us, they gave the ranch away. After all, a ranch without water is no ranch at all.

Did my great grandfather and other pioneers come here aware they might not have water rights? Or that they could become subjects of a tribal government in which they had no vote and no voice? I don't think so.

I respectfully urge you to vote no on this grievously over reaching, and unconstitutional compact agreement.

Let my family keep our ranching culture and heritage alive, and we will continue producing food for America and the world for another 100 years.

